



# De-Escalation Strategies

This is not an exhaustive list of de-escalation strategies. If a caregiver is present, ask that person for tips on the person's triggers and calming strategies. Note, not all of these techniques will be effective for each person. You may have to try several of the listed options before discovering what works best for that person.

## Communication

- Identify yourself
- Use non-threatening body language
- Call the person by their name
- If the person doesn't use verbal communication, allow them the opportunity to write or type.
- Look to see if the person uses a communication device. If so, they may need to keep it with them.
- Use active listening
- Ask questions one at a time
- Speak calmly
- Speak in short sentences and use direct, literal language – no sarcasm or slang terms
- Have the person go with you to a place where more personal (1:1 communication) can occur
- Understand the person may need processing time and may not be able to respond to questions, commands or instruction immediately
- Consider using pictures or other visuals, gestures, written text
- Let the person know how long you want to talk, and when they get a break. Set a timer so the person can see how long they have until the break. Keep in mind some people may only be able to tolerate 10, 5 or even only 3 minutes at a time.

## Redirection

- Redirect using the person's passions (ex. if the person's passion is dogs, talk about your own dog, pull up pictures of dogs on the internet, etc.)
- Is there something you might have in your car of interest to them?

## Sensory issues

- Move to a quiet area if possible
- Cut lights and sirens if safe to do so
- Turn down police radio
- If the person seems somewhat "lost in space", allow them to anchor themselves. Offer them to lean on your car, against a guardrail, sit in a chair or on the curb, etc.

## Make the person feel empowered

- Remind the person of potential consequences of actions
- Guide the person through problem solving
- Remind the person of coping skills: Ask "when you are feeling this way, what helps you?"
- If possible give the person choices so they don't feel as though they have lost all control of the situation

## General techniques

- Slow your movements down and telegraph your movements – state each action you are taking so your movements are predictable
- When doing a physical assessment for injury, go toe-to-head (rather than head-to-toe). This way you are going from least invasive, to most, and that can help reduce anxiety.
- If the person is not at risk for injuring themselves or others, try waiting it out and allow them time to decompress on their own.



## Questions Dispatchers and First Responders Should Ask

This is not an exhaustive list, however these questions and tips offer the basics in information gathering when a person with an intellectual/developmental disability (IDD) is involved.

### General Questions for the Caregiver

- What is the person's diagnosis?
- What are the person's triggers, fears and passions?
- What coping strategies does the person typically use?
- Does the person have sensory issues? What is their tolerance for lights, sounds, touch?
- What communication methods does the person prefer?
- What assistance does the person need? Do they need time? Support? Space?
- Is the person threatening to hurt themselves or others?
- Is the person on any medications?
- Is the person afraid of police? Will they recognize a police uniform?

### Critical Missing - Questions for the Caregiver

- Does your child have a favorite or typical place where they go? (Or has expressed a desire to go?)
- What are your child's triggers, fears and passions? Include specific resources used by search teams – K9s, helicopter, police, police cars, etc.
- Will your child respond to their name?
- Do they have any form of identification on them?
- Do they have sensory issues? What about tolerance for lights, sounds, touch?
- Where are the bodies of water?
- Can your child swim or understand water safety?
- How long has the person been missing? (push for an accurate time frame)
- Is the person on any medications?
- Is the person afraid of police? Will they recognize a police uniform?

### Tips when questioning an individual with an intellectual or developmental disability:

- Ask open-ended questions, such as, "What is happening?" or "How can I help you?"
- Avoid questions requiring abstract thinking such as, "How old do you think he was?"
- Do not pretend to understand a response
- Be alert to signs of increased frustration
- Tell the person what actions you are taking
- If the person doesn't use verbal communication, allow them the opportunity to write, type, or use pictures.
- Look to see if the person uses a communication device. If so, they may need to keep it with them
- Ask questions one at a time
- Speak calmly
- Speak in short sentences and use direct, literal language – no sarcasm or slang terms
- Understand the person may need processing time and may not be able to respond to questions immediately
- Expect and allow for rocking or other self-soothing behaviors
- Take your time, there's no need to rush or add undue pressure once you know the person is safe

Should any medical attention be required, notify the medics as soon as possible that the person has an IDD. If medical attention is non-emergent, introduce the medics as though you were introducing a friend of yours to another friend. If you, the officer, have built a rapport with the person, consider riding in the medic with them in an effort to minimize any anxiety or sensory overload.



# Critical Missing Persons

## If you find an individual with an Intellectual/Developmental Disability (IDD)

Exercise care when looking for identification, labels, shoe tags, etc. Keep your movements slow and tell the person each action you're taking so your movements are predictable. Consider starting from toe to head instead of head to toe (this way you're going from least invasive to most - and that can help reduce anxiety).

### Look for the following items:

- State ID
- Look for Emergency Contacts listed on ID (scroll to bottom of soundex)
- Labels in/on clothing
- Shoe tags
- Medic Alert bracelets
- Temporary tattoos

### Assess for possible abuse or neglect

- Once you have identified where the person lives, pause before simply taking them back.
- Abuse and neglect are common – individuals with I/DD are 4-10 times more likely to be victimized than the general population. This is the case for both relatives and non-familial caregivers.
- Look in the house for other signs of possible abuse and neglect
- If you suspect abuse or neglect, call the proper agency for an investigation:
  - For children - Child Protective Services (CPS)
  - For adults - Adult Protective Services (APS)

**26.7%** of all children with IDD elope

**49%** of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) elope from a safe environment

**More than 1/3** of children with ASD cannot communicate their name, address or phone number

**71% of deaths** related to wandering caused by drowning

## If you are searching for someone

### Questions to ask the caregiver

- Has the person ever eloped before?
- If so, where did the person go?
- Can your child swim or understand water safety?
- Does the person have family/friends or favorite place nearby they might be trying to visit?
- Is the person able to verbally communicate? If no, how does the person communicate?
- Will the person respond to their name?
- Will they bolt and run (do they lack regard for safety/traffic)? Do they like to be chased (think it is a game)?
- What developmental/cognitive age would you describe the person? Would they be able to perform any self-care tasks, ie. going to the bathroom alone, seeking shelter from inclement/dangerous weather, seek out food/water for themselves?
- Is the person on any medications?
- What are the person's passions?
- Is the person afraid of dogs and helicopters, or would K9 and aviation draw him out?
- Is the person afraid of police? Will they recognize a police uniform?

<https://pathfindersforautism.org/resources/safety/>



# Critical Missing Persons

*...continued*

## What to do in a search

- Google Map for bodies of water – SEND OFFICERS THERE IMMEDIATELY
- Call in resources to saturate the area
- Get out of the car, go door to door with a photo
- Don't search with preconceived notions of where the person may/may not be
- Push caregivers about the amount of time a person has been missing
  - Let them know they aren't in trouble
  - Changes the parameter of search
- Use media and social media
- Don't let distractions keep you from your search (ex., end of shift)
- Check hospitals – GO THERE
- Pass look-outs on to metro, neighboring jurisdictions, etc.
- Have neighbors check their houses
- Minimum of 2 officers check house (or last place seen) independently
- Use Reverse 9-1-1 / A Child Is Missing to get the information out (this service is an auto-dialer that will call households within a zipcode(s) area and notify residents of critical missing children or vulnerable adults)
- Should any medical attention be required, notify the medics as soon as possible that the person has an IDD. If medical attention is non-emergent, introduce the medics as though you were introducing a friend of yours to another friend. If you, the officer, have built a rapport with the person, consider riding in the medic with them in an effort to minimize any anxiety or sensory overload.